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# WOMEN FARM WORKERS

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

THE 1943 STORY OF THE  
WOMEN'S LAND ARMY OF  
THE U.S. CROP CORPS.



EXTENSION SERVICE • WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION  
OCTOBER 1943

USDA  
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## SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

150,000 women workers were placed on farms by the Extension Service Farm Labor Program between April 29 and September 1, 1943.

50,000 more, it is estimated, will have been placed by the end of the season.

50,000 of these had worked a month or more by July 31, thus becoming eligible for WLA.

6,000 were reported as placed in year-round work.

21 States reported women workers numbering more than 1,000 placed in July and August.

10 States reported more than 5,000 placed in these 2 months.

30 States had part-time supervisors of the Women's Land Army.

13 States had full-time supervisors, some with assistants.

9 States gave special agricultural short courses to train women for farm work; many more stand ready to do so.

17 States conducted camps for women workers.









## THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY and agricultural goals for 1944

**LABOR NEED** No doubt exists that women will be needed on farms in larger numbers in 1944 than in 1943. A recent study makes clear: (1) That attainment of maximum agricultural production will require a moderate increase in year-round farm workers and a fairly significant increase in seasonal workers; (2) that the present farm working force is already working long hours, and hence additional work required will call for proportionately greater increases in number of workers than formerly; and (3) that additional labor demands in agricultural production will be superimposed upon a labor market that is growing exceedingly tight.

It is against this background of greater need that the experiences of the 1943 season should be weighed in preparation for the use of more women farm workers in 1944.

**EXPERIENCE** The Women's Land Army program in 1943 was based upon a careful assessment of various small-scale experiments with women workers in 1942, upon the recommendations of four groups of Extension Service leaders who met in the spring of 1943 to canvass the possibilities of using women workers on farms, and upon the estimated labor needs for 1943.

The plan adopted to stimulate recruitment of women for farm work included the following salient points:

1. A name, "The Women's Land Army of the U. S. Crop Corps," to provide an easy means of identification in speaking, writing, and otherwise publicizing the need for women farm workers.
2. Minimum standards for members of the Women's Land Army - physical fitness, an age requirement of

18 years or over, a month's service - to give status and dignity to the individual woman serving her country through farm work.

3. A well-designed work outfit to insure comfort and safety to the woman on the job and to serve as identification.

To develop the program, 43 States assigned a Women's Land Army supervisor, either part-time or full-time, to assist the State farm labor supervisor specifically in relation to women workers.

A number of materials were issued by the director of the Women's Land Army to assist the state WLA supervisors. These included a recruitment leaflet and a recruitment poster, as well as materials useful in publicity and to the women workers themselves.

Many States were plunged immediately into getting women workers on farms. The emphasis during this season has been in placing women workers rather than in giving recognition through enrollment of women in the Women's Land Army. The value of the latter is recognized, however, particularly in drawing upon new sources. Enrollment of those eligible - farm women doing agricultural work, year-round women workers, and seasonal workers with more than 1 month's service - is now going on.

The National Advisory Committee to the Women's Land Army, meeting in September, recommended that WLA membership be widened to include any woman working on a farm to save food crops for war uses. Length of service would be designated by appropriate insignia. This recommendation is now being considered.



# WOMEN FARM WORKERS

were drawn from many sources



College girls, teachers, store clerks, telephone girls, stenographers, and many other business and professional women, as well as wives of servicemen and other homemakers made up the army of seasonal workers.



Some gave 5 months, others a month or more; many gave their full vacation of 1 or 2 week's duration. Often groups of business girls worked after their regular hours and on Saturdays and Sundays. College girls and teachers worked during their long 3 months vacation. Housewives went to work in the fields after the family had been breakfasted and sent off to work or to school.



Farm wives and daughters added outdoor tasks to their household duties, lengthening their working day and broadening their farm responsibilities. Some girls who had gone to town returned to the farm to take the place of brothers in the armed services.



# WOMEN FARM WORKERS

## fought on many food battle fronts

The seasonal women workers were particularly useful in harvesting beans, tomatoes, lettuce, and other vegetables during the peak loads, but they also assisted in planting and hoeing. They topped onions in Michigan, detasseled corn throughout the Midwest, shocked wheat in North Dakota, picked cotton and shook peanuts in the South, picked potatoes in Maine, picked, graded, and packed apples, peaches, grapes, other fruits and nuts on the West Coast. Most of them were inexperienced in farm work, but their cheerful spirit, their eagerness to learn, their willingness to work hard, won them the respect of the farmers who employed them.

Women also performed regular farm chores, such as driving tractors and feeding livestock, and were in demand as dairy and poultry workers in the Northeast States and other parts of the country.





## STATES report on problems

### FLORIDA

"The women of north Florida counties, which are mainly rural, showed more interest in the Women's Land Army than the women of the more urban south Florida. Women and girls, both white and Negro, will need to give considerable service this year in harvesting and packing the citrus crop as well as the truck crops of south Florida."

### WISCONSIN

"From June 1 to September 1 farm labor assistants and extension workers placed 758 women and 3,388 girls on Wisconsin farms. This is only a small part of the total group of women and girls working on farms. We should devise some way of estimating the number of village and city women who actually worked on farms and the number of farm women who devoted an unusual amount of time to farm work this year."

### MASSACHUSETTS

"Results of recruitment for year-round workers are disappointing. We are not solving the problem of interesting women...There is a greater acceptance of the fact that there will not be the manpower to take care of our needs this year, and it will be even more critical next year...We are competing with heavy demands for women to work in industry and with campaigns for recruits for WAVES and WACS."

### CALIFORNIA

"We are busier now than we have ever been. We are opening a camp next Monday for picking tomatoes and walnuts. We are on all the radio programs this week, have much newspaper publicity, and are really coming into our own. The big problem is getting the women this late in the year. We have a high-powered recruiting campaign. It should bring results, but there are not many so far."

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

"Our major problem is finding year-round workers. I could place 50 in the next 2 days if I had them...We are not having trouble convincing farmers they should take women, but I am embarrassed by the number of requests we cannot fill."

### ALABAMA

"Please send 500 membership cards. We have 485 women enrolled in 16 counties...We are having an exhibit booth at the State fair next week."

### NEW MEXICO

"One of our problems has been persuading county extension agents that women could do farm work...Attitude of farmers in some cases will need to be changed, although in many instances there has been no difficulty there."



## STATES report on problems

### MINNESOTA

"Our start with the 1943 program was late. We placed a few groups for seasonal work, and our camp relations were very fine. Supervision was exceptional and is important. We had excellent cooperation from our agricultural agents, both in the north, where recruitment was made, and in the south, where work was done.

"Next year we are going to be forced to use more younger girls than before.

"Our experiments with city girls going to farms for vacations has been very satisfactory.

"We are making plans for a general farm-help training program at the university."

### VIRGINIA

"One difficulty has been the reluctance of farmers in Virginia to accept women farm workers. More particularly I believe it is a matter of reluctance on the part of farm people to house these women in their own homes."

### NEBRASKA

"Farm women in Nebraska have done a real job this summer. Many of these women had worked in the fields before, but many never dreamed they would...The farmer is willing to accept the help of his wife or daughter, but hiring some other woman is a different matter...There seems to be little reluctance to hire women in groups to do peak-load jobs.

"There were 1,325 women who went to the farm to help do the job. Most of the work done was peak-load such as beets, corn detasseling, or potato picking. Employers were very well satisfied with the work done and some even enthusiastic.

"Training on the job is the only kind of training that has been done. A training course in the spring is being considered.

"If the major part of WLA recruitment for next year is for crew work, college girls will probably be the best source of supply.

"Dairy workers are the crying need at present."

### NEW JERSEY

"We believe in the unit plan rather than locating women in the farm homes. The attitude of our farmers has been excellent. Training on the job by the farmer has been preceded by evening training at the camp by the county agent or emergency farm labor man."



## WOMEN liked farm work

"Work on a farm has afforded me the most unique, educational, and thoroughly worth-while summer I have ever had."

"...one of the best summers in health gained, new friends made, and perhaps most important of all, a conscience eased by doing some useful work."

"Many of us are already talking about returning next year."

"I do hope if the war does go on next year a lot of such groups as ours can be organized, so that others may have the grand experience and fun I did."

"...how tired I was - not because the work was too hard, but because I was not used to it."

"The only thing that became boring was sterilizing the milk bottles, but we managed to kid ourselves through them so we didn't mind them too much..haying and corn were the best part of farm work."

"It wasn't as hard work as I thought it would be, even though each type of hoeing has a new set of aches."

## FARMERS appreciated the work of women

"I have only nice things to say about the girls. Any one of them is worth two of the young boys I am using in the orchards. I can place as many women as you can bring." - Vermont

"I had a crew of 38 women and 4 boys detasseling corn. The 38 women did the best job any crew has ever done for me." - Nebraska

"I never had more satisfactory help in all the years I've been farming." - New Jersey

"She is the best 'hired man' I've ever had." - Minnesota, Massachusetts, and other States.

"The women stood the work of stripping grass seed fine. In many cases they were just as good as men." - Iowa

"If all the girls they send out are as good as Bessie, nobody will have a kick coming." - Michigan

"Intelligent," "green but eager to learn," "willing," "hardworking," "cheerful," etc. - Many States





# WOMEN FARM WORKERS had a good press

## CITY GIRLS 'SLICK' AS FARMERS Pitch Hay Like Veterans

WASHINGTON (U.P.)—City girls and proving

## Thousands of American Women T Farm,

Land Armies A Workers fo in M

DURING three y almost entirely tinued planting and in the Axis-contr of men in the fi a sustenance pay In this

## Women En In Farm A As Booths

Drive for Vacation Full-Time Workers An to Enlist Crews From City

A drive to enlist women for full-tin as regular farm ha New York yesterday Man-Power Commi recruitment booths i partment and speci Simultaneously th



SEPTEMBER 27, 1943 10 CENTS  
YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$4.50

## Women Help the Harvest Grandmothers Farm Camp

shortage one of the Michigan girls and vesting crops. This re at an Emergency

ave been picked by a kindergarten

## Out King Day

## And Aching 2,000 Women ing Farmers Harvests

By Ann Cottrell  
WASHINGTON, Aug. 17.—Miss

A. P. Dron, chairman of the Fresno Harvest Council, this week announced that the Women's Land Army is being organized in Fresno. Approaches toward a harvest period, the goal of 40,000 women hopes that be doubled or harvest period.



WOMEN FARM WORKERS had a good day

122  
CITY GIRLS SUE AS FARMERS

Each Day They Pick

Thousands of Apples

For the Market

and for the

Home

of the

Country

and the

World

at Large

and the

Future

of the

Human

Race

and the

World

at Large